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ONLY A DAY SCHOOL

WOMAN'S BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 156
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Only a Day School

"What is the work?" "Oh! it is *only a day school!*" Some of us have heard this so often that it seems worth while to tell what a day school settlement in the Southern Mountains under our Woman's Board is, and what it means to the community where it is placed.

And, first of all, let us have a few figures concerning the public school system in North Carolina, for instance; since the questions occur most naturally to those unacquainted with the facts. "Why spend money in establishing day schools?" "Are there no public schools?"

In North Carolina the public school system is but ten years old, and, owing to the poverty of the State and the indifference of the public, in efficiency it is far behind the system of almost every other State.

In 1890, 26 per cent. of white persons in North Carolina were unable to read or write. That means that one in every four was illiterate.

The total sum spent each year per pupil is lower than in any other State

except South Carolina. The average sum in North Carolina, including salaries and expenses of State and County Boards and superintendents, the salaries of teachers and all building and repairs, is $3.40; in Georgia, $6.50; in Virginia, $9; Indiana, $20; Michigan, $20; Wisconsin, $21; Minnesota, $30; North Dakota, $33.50.

Average amount paid for schools by each taxpayer: In North Carolina, $2.13; Maine, $9.23; Virginia, $4.72; Florida, $5.93; Iowa, $15.

In 1893 the average amount expended in North Carolina on each child of school age to supply school building and equipment and teacher was $1.15.

These figures give too bright a picture, for many of the counties are far below the average. Two examples, taken from two neighboring counties, neither of them at the bottom of the list, will help to show how this affects the country districts.

Six years ago a valley which numbers 80 or more children of school age had never had a public school. The money was saved for four years until enough had accumulated to build a schoolhouse, with a prospect after that of a two or three months' school each year, with an inefficient teacher, one but little removed in knowledge and not at all in manners from her pupils.

Another settlement has never had a school until two years ago, when a log hut was built and six weeks' school held each of the two past years. In this district there are 47 children of school age, and only $38 a year with which to provide schooling for them.

These are not isolated facts; they are multiplied by the hundreds through the mountains.

It has been found by experience that the establishment of a day school to supplement the public school work of a community does not pauperize the people, but educates them to feel the value of such a school, and tends to make the public school system more effective in neighboring communities by force of example.

To understand the place to which the day school workers go you must imagine a valley shut in on all sides by mountains covered with a thick growth of oak and walnut and pine, a few cabins and farm houses scattered along the road which runs through the center; not enough dwellings in sight to account for the ninety or more children said to be within reach of the proposed school, though a crowd of little faces peeps at you from every cabin door. You must climb over the mountains on either side, follow the different "prongs" of the creek, and thread many a path

through the woods to the out-of-the-way cabins before you find where all the children are to come from.

The people depend for their living chiefly upon farming, done with few appliances and little skill. Many own no land, and as renters, have a hard struggle. Sunday is ill-kept, and morals are lax. Perhaps an attempt has been made to carry on a Sunday school, but through want of interest or through neighborhood jealousies it has come to naught. The better class of people are "plumb out of heart," as they see their children growing up without education, with evil influences around them, but they are helpless without a leader.

To such a neighborhood as this, two or three women are sent, and the first thing they do is to make a home. If they try to board, even with the best of the people, they waste health and strength, and lose, besides, one of the strongest factors in their influence as an uplifting force in the community. One young woman sent alone to such a post, wrote, after two months' trial, "I shall die of remorse if I go away, and of loneliness and dyspepsia if I stay." With the establishment of the teachers' home, we are no longer shut up to these alternatives.

So the plain, neat little cottage is built,

not better than the neighbors might aspire to, if their ambition were aroused, and it becomes a refuge for the weary teachers, a model of good housekeeping, of beauty and of cleanliness, and a center of help and neighborly kindness.

Then comes the day school, which continues for eight or nine months of the year, and requires one or two teachers, according to the number of scholars.

At first it is pioneer work, for some of the boys and girls of twelve years and upwards come without any knowledge of reading and without habits of study. It is easier to deal with the little people. But a few months' work does wonders for all. To some of the children who are used to hard work at home and in the field, going to school is a holiday, and their faces lose the blank care-worn look that marked them. They learn to use their minds, to play at recess times, and life becomes a different thing.

Sunday school workers often feel the difficulty of counteracting in one or two hours a week the influences at work on their pupils the rest of the time. We find it is a far more hopeful matter to have the children with us a large part of five days, and, in spite of adverse home influence, the right direction has been given to many a young life in our day schools. In the rare

cases where the parental training is good, the work is far easier.

It is not long before the parents begin to take interest and pride in the progress of their children. They attend the occasional public days, Washington's Birthday, Christmas, and the exercises at the close of the school term. In spite of one or two crooked sticks who are pleased with nothing, and who fight the school with might and main, perhaps on account of this very opposition, the school takes stronger hold on the community each year and the people "brag of it" whenever they go abroad, so that families move in "plumb from neighboring counties" to get these advantages for their children. I could tell interesting stories of these newcomers, of the good that has come to them because they diligently sought that which was good.

One of the missionary household has no duties in the schoolroom except a general supervision. It would be hard to define her position more accurately than was done by a neighbor who inquired for her as "the woman who runs things." Another neighbor calls her "the busiest human on the creek," and indeed she is, for she has many "things" to run. Housekeeping in itself is not easy so many miles from supplies, but that becomes a minor matter

after the other duties begin to pile up.

To her falls the greater share of the visiting, and she finds her way to the homes far and near. In some of these homes there are old people, infirm or bedridden, to whom no preacher of the Gospel has found his way with a word of comfort, and who are most grateful for a visit and for "good talk" and a prayer. They say it gives them something to "study on" in the long, lonely days. Some of the women are shy and suspicious, and it is some time before they give their trust to the stranger, but once gained their confidence is wholehearted.

So many opportunities come to one who is looking for them; a simple remedy given for an ailment; nourishing food for an invalid who "caint seem like eat the corn bread and bacon," a hint to a wife or daughter in the care of the sick; the dressing of a bad surgical case; helping out the slender trousseau of a bride, or robing a little body for the grave in fair, white garments, which brings a little sense of comfort to the poor mother, and earns her lasting love for the one who cared for her darling.

At one such day school station in a large, well-lighted room on the teacher's premises, is held the mother's meeting once a week. The women have the hardest, most isolated lives of all in these mountain

communities, and this meeting is a source of brightness to them, the one thing quite their own. Here they sew and tell of old times and new, listen with earnest attention to a Bible reading, and have a chance of doing a little shopping. In the missionary's attic are ready-made garments and good stout material to sell at low prices, and she and the women have many consultations together as the children are "fixed" for school out of these stores. Work is given of various kinds, knitting, spinning, weaving, and the money earned is a wonderful help in getting the children's outfits.

This same room is used for various other purposes—girls' sewing classes, mission circle meetings, carving class for boys, a children's party, and now and then the older boys come here by invitation to spend an evening playing games. There is too little innocent fun to be had in these neighborhoods, and much that is objectionable, and it pays to give the boys the right sort of a good time.

On Sunday there is always the Sunday school and meetings of an informal kind, and once in a while a minister comes to preach.

By the work of the teachers in the school and in the homes, the ground is prepared for him and the Word falls on good soil.

the hundreds of applicants, those who will best repay the advantages given them. At the Home Industrial School in Asheville, the greater part of the scholarships are now filled by girls recommended by the teachers of our day schools.

This in turn is a help and incentive to those who attend the day schools, for they have learned that these coveted scholarships are only to be had by those who prove their worthiness by regular attendance and application.

In a recent speech, a distinguished son of North Carolina spoke with sympathy of the mountaineer as "the forgotten man." By his fellow men he has been forgotten, but he is not forgotten before God. These schools, like stars in the darkness, are the proof that God is calling them to our remembrance. Happy are we, if, hearing the call, we have a part in the coming of the day.

Price, 2 cts. each; $1.50 per 100.

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